

Members of the grant selection committee,

The Town of Gilbert's Native American Management Internship (NAMI) program is excellent. I worked as an intern for seven months in 2018, and I can honestly say that it was the most beneficial practical experience of my academic career.

Working in Gilbert, I learned about leadership development, relationship building, problem-solving processes, and a lot of professional interpersonal things that can't be taught in a classroom. As a Master of Public Administration (MPA) student, it was valuable to translate the things I had been learning about in school to a real-world setting.

The people who run NAMI have put a lot of thought and care into crafting an experience that instills service leadership values while developing professional habits. NAMI is a high-quality program that prepares students for the degree of professionalism expected in top-tier government work and exposes them to the world of public administration through executive leadership roles.

It provides an opportunity for young Native professionals to grow as public servants and witness general government operations through a lens other than the perhaps more familiar setting of tribal government. Young indigenous public servants will benefit from the variety of experiences provided by the program and the communities they serve in the future will bear the fruit of their leadership.

Below I have included the list of top five lessons I learned from my time with Gilbert and have passed along as advice to future interns:

1. Everyone is a leader in one way or another. In the NAMI program, and at Gilbert in general, there is an emphasis on leadership development. This is a great opportunity to grow as a leader. Whether you are used to being in positions of authority or never thought of yourself as a leader before, everyone has the capacity to become a *better* leader. This internship isn't just about learning to work in an office, it's about learning to lead with integrity and serve with humility. Take what you learn here and try to apply it to other areas in your life.
2. Don't be afraid to try new things. Gilbert has a wonderful organizational culture. One of my favorite attributes of this work environment is how willing everyone is to share their work and experience with you. They want to show you how they contribute to the larger effort of serving the public. Take this opportunity to learn something new. Work in a department just because it sounds interesting, and speak up when you realize it's not your cup of tea. Ask questions. It can't hurt.
3. Build relationships. The best learning opportunities come from the connections we establish with others. These are the intangible, yet possibly most important lessons you will learn. Plus, relationships are the key to producing your best work possible. So, don't isolate yourself. Get out there and connect with others.
4. Don't be afraid to share your heritage. As an O'otham and Pee Posh person, I loved telling my Gilbert co-workers about the original inhabitants of this land, my ancestors. In my experience, people here were respectful and willing – even excited – to learn about my people's culture, history, and language. This helps build connections with people, opens them up to sharing about themselves, and shows them that you are willing to share a piece of yourself as well.
5. When doing research, do not take a solutions-first approach to problem-solving. Instead, try to remind yourself regularly to view challenges from different angles; seek other perspectives. Ask yourself, "what is the problem we are trying to solve?" even when it may seem obvious. This will help you

take steady, incremental progress rather than wasting time chasing far-off solutions to problems you don't know you have.

Employees of the Town of Gilbert are friendly, hard-working, and enthusiastic about serving the public. Being immersed in that setting is a great opportunity for Native students on a journey toward becoming professional public servants.

Best,
Mikhail Sundust